

ITERATION AND TRUTH: A FIFTH "ORIENTATION OF THOUGHT"

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ABSTRACT: This article offers a novel interpretation of Jacques Derrida's deconstructive thought in terms of model theory. Taking its cue from Paul Livingston's *Politics of Logic*, which interprets Derrida as a thinker of inconsistent totalities, the article argues that Livingston's description of Derrida is unable to accommodate certain consistency-driven aspects of Derrida's work. These aspects pertain to Derrida's notion of "iterability". The article demonstrates that the context-bound nature of iteration – the altering repetition of any discrete unit of meaning – and Derrida's possibilist view of context – that a context need not be part of the actual world to merit consideration – lead to the possibility of articulating iteration with the model-theoretical notion of truth. In model theory, truth is a relation between a sentence and the class of models in which the sentence is true. Arguing that the same holds for Derrida's iterations and contexts, the article, in presenting the first rigorous truth-definition internal to deconstructive thought, outlines a "fifth orientation of thought" alongside the four orientations listed in Livingston's book: if, according to Livingston, one can relate the whole of being to the whole of thought in one of four different ways, the aspects of Derrida's work that do not fall within this schema call out for another possible orientation.

KEYWORDS: Iterability; Undecidability; Model Theory; Possible Worlds; Derrida; Hintikka; Livingston

INTRODUCTION

Paul Livingston's *Politics of Logic* is to be saluted as that rare and valuable piece of philosophical literature: a splendidly imaginative and rigorously argued work, it is uniquely capable of rethinking and thereby recasting virtually all of the great divides of contemporary philosophy. It is, in the best way imaginable, a work to rapt our dogmatic slumbers.

Yet it is also a very recent work; and works of such magnitude tend to be somewhat opaque to their immediate contemporaries. *Politics of Logic*, from this vantage, is best described as a *text* in the sense defined by Jacques Derrida: ‘A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game’¹.

Thus the reflections that the following pages have to offer, though seeking to problematize a certain line of argument in Livingston’s work, do not presume to evaluate its general claim—the claim, that is, that the signature effect of the ‘linguistic turn’ in twentieth-century philosophy lies in its having foregrounded the problem of *formalization* in a way intimately connected with the most pressing issues of contemporary political life. The logico-mathematical formalization of language, Livingston says, has been able, in an unprecedented way, to recognise and articulate what paradoxes emerge when language meets its limits. In Livingston’s view this is closely paralleled by the intense focus of continental thinkers on the paradoxes inherent in each and every system, whether of political, communal, and social organization, or, more generally, of conceptual and intellectual organization. In both domains every totality can be seen to include some element that reflects the totality while escaping its structural undergirdings and thereby generates paradoxes (in logic, Livingston’s key example is the Gödel sentence that expresses a truth not provable in the system; in political philosophy, conversely, one important instance is the extra-legal sovereign who institutes the legal order). It is with a great degree of perspicacity and detail that Livingston elaborates this argument. Hence the necessity of stating once more that the following critical engagement with the work is neither global in its scope nor at all destructive in its aims.

What I shall briefly argue herein is that the list of four ‘orientations of thought’ drawn by Livingston, four ways to relate thought to being, of which the fourth is Livingston’s addition to a list originally drawn by Alain Badiou, may be further supplemented by a *fifth* orientation. Yet what are these orientations? ‘Since each orientation preconditions the thinkability of being as a whole’, Livingston writes, ‘we may indeed take them to amount to a series of positional total relations to the infinite totality of what is, or what is sayable of it’². The brief definitions Livingston offers of the orientations are as follows:

Paradoxico-critical: Any position that, recognizing reflexivity and its paradoxes, nevertheless draws out the consequences of the being of the totality,

¹ Derrida (2004), p. 69.

² Livingston (2011), p. 53. Referred to hereafter in text as *PL*.

and sees the effects of these paradoxes always are operative within the One of this totality.

Generic: Any position that, recognizing reflexivity and its paradoxes, denies the being of the totality and sees these paradoxes as traversing an irreducible Many.

Criteriological/Constructivist: Any position that attempts to delimit the totality consistently from a stable point *outside* of it.

Onto-Theological: Any position that sees the totality as complete and consistent in itself, though beyond the grasp of finite cognition, which is located simply *within* the totality. (*PL* 58)

Of these orientations, the first, ‘paradoxico-critical’ one, is Livingston’s own coinage; the other three are drawn from Badiou. As already noted, each stands for a particular way of relating the thinkable, or the sayable, to whatever can be said to be; but these broadly metaphysical or ontological stances are further differentiated by how they relate to the more specifically formal question of *totality*. There are but few options open in this respect. Firstly, one may affirm the totality of being or of thought to be both consistent and complete (the ‘onto-theological’ orientation). Secondly, one may affirm the consistency of the totality but deny its completeness, which can be done in two ways: either A) to postulate ever new metalanguages able to resolve the paradoxes of lower-level languages yet unable to avoid encountering paradoxes of their own (‘criteriological/constructivist’) or B) to pursue the potential disruption of new truths into existing situations by holding to no other rule than formal consistency (‘generic’). Thirdly, and finally, one may affirm the completeness of the totality but deny its consistency (‘paradoxico-critical’), seeking thereby to articulate the formal-syntactical loci where the total system can be seen both to found itself and to founder on its inconsistency.

In this respect the orientations are partitioned according to which side of a *metallogical duality* each of them falls. This metallogical duality that Livingston has so perceptively formulated arises from his equally perceptive take on the general philosophical consequences of Gödel’s famous incompleteness theorems. Gödel, in Livingston’s reading, in effect presents us with two options: we can opt for completeness or for consistency, yet we cannot, *if* we are in the position to choose between them (as we would not be if we held either an onto-theological stance or a pre-critical criteriological one), choose both. Livingston writes:

More generally, then, we might put the situation as follows. It is not in fact the case that the implications of the Russell paradox or any of the related semantic paradoxes immediately force us to reject, as Badiou claims, the ‘One-All.’ The effect of the paradox is rather to *split* the One-All into two interpretative

hypotheses and force a decision between them. *Either* we may reject the ‘All’ of totality while *preserving* the ‘One’ of consistency—this is Badiou’s solution—or, alternatively, we may preserve the All of totality while *sacrificing*, at least in certain cases, the One of consistency. From a metalogical perspective, in view of the reflexive paradoxes and antinomies, there is, in other words, a rigorous duality or dichotomy, what we may call the *metalogical duality* between consistency (with incompleteness) and completeness (with inconsistency). (PL 53)

Thus we are forced to think of language *either* as able to express all truths but unable to avoid paradoxes *or* as able to overcome paradoxes but unable to reach all possible truths. What Badiou terms his own generic orientation opts for the latter, while the paradoxico-critical orientation, comprising thinkers as divergent as Jacques Lacan, Giorgio Agamben, the later Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Derrida, affirms the former. The whole of *Politics of Logic* consists in a rigorous and impressive argument in favour of the paradoxico-critical orientation.

In what follows I will suggest, however, that Derrida’s work may be considered to embody—or at least to provide the possibility for conceiving—a *fifth* orientation. I will not as yet name this orientation. Deconstructive thought, I will argue, does not necessarily fall, without remainder, within the paradoxico-critical orientation. On this view the paradoxical features of his work would be able to function otherwise than as intra-systemic locations where the inconsistency of the system is registered. A paradox might, on this reading, signal a place where a transformative expansion of the system is called for; it would then indicate that a truth in excess of the system makes itself felt within the system. This reading, however, is not to be taken as a refutation of Livingston’s decision to group Derrida among the paradoxico-critical thinkers. That both strains may be identified in Derrida’s work, strains upon which the Gödelian trial stamps the sign of incommensurability, indicates that some more profound structure might yet be articulated. In the first part of this article I will lay the foundations for this articulation. In the two following sections I will elaborate this structure by interrogating the possibility of a Derridean notion of truth. The fourth section relates this notion to Livingston’s paradoxico-critical orientation. In the concluding chapter I will define and name the fifth orientation of thought.

I: Inconsistency or incompleteness, universal medium or calculus: A Collingwoodian Parallax

In *An Essay on Metaphysics*, R. G. Collingwood defines philosophical analysis, the ‘work of disentangling and arranging questions’, as the work of ‘detecting presuppositions’³: to engage in metaphysical analysis is to ‘attempt to find out what absolute

³ Collingwood (1998), p. 39–40.

presuppositions have been made by this or that person or group of persons, on this or that occasion or group of occasions, in the course of this or that piece of thinking'⁴. Such ultimate presuppositions, though tacit and unreflected, are distinguished by being so consistent and consequential as to yield themselves to systematic scrutiny. For what such presuppositions mean, first of all, is that some general question is implicitly *answered*, and thus *assumed* to be answerable, although these questions are often identified only subsequently. A system acquires a great degree of consistency through the answer it presupposes—or the question that one of its answers presupposes—without feeling the need to treat it as a systematic premise.

In this sense, *Politics of Logic*, though it never references Collingwood, is intensely Collingwoodian, and nowhere more so than in its emphasis on the decision forced upon us by Gödel's theorems. Innumerable thinkers have found it incumbent on themselves to reflect on what the theorems imply, but none, in truth, have gone so far as Livingston in identifying just what a systematic watershed point it is. Faced with the consequences of Gödel's theorems, most thinkers, whether in the 'analytic' or 'continental' camp, have in Livingston's view opted for one reading of them, affirming either the inconsistency or the incompleteness of all systems. But none have identified this as a matter of choice, as a critical moment of decision, whose consequences are truly momentous (*PL* 52). That one is forced to choose between inconsistency and incompleteness points to a tacit presupposition that meets all the Collingwoodian criteria. It is, in short, an ultimate presupposition of twentieth-century philosophy. One might even venture that it is *the* ultimate presupposition of twentieth-century philosophy.

Yet it is not the only candidate for this position. It contends for this place with another presupposition—explicitly formulated *as* a Collingwoodian presupposition—that is in fact formulated from within a position captured by Livingston's metalogical duality. I am referring to the distinction drawn by Jaakko Hintikka, the eminent Finnish logician, between *language as universal medium* and *language as calculus*. Such, for Hintikka, is 'the ultimate presupposition of twentieth-century philosophy'. Philosophers who see language as a universal medium tend to think of it, in Hintikka's words, as 'an inescapable intermediary between me and the world, a medium I cannot dispense with'⁵. This inescapability has the unfortunate effect of making it impossible for me to 'discuss in my language the relationships that connect it with the world' (*LUCR* 3), because if language always already determines how I relate to the world, I cannot possibly say how my relation to the world might be different. To say

⁴ Collingwood (1998), p. 47.

⁵ Hintikka (1997), p. 3. Referred to hereafter in text as *LUCR*.

that my language might be differently calibrated with reality would be to contradict the very structure that allows me to say anything in the first place. If, for instance, I believed that language reveals the world, I could not conceive of language as merely indicating shreds and patches of it. This is because the latter hypothesis would be possible only if language had already revealed this possibility. Thus the indicative view of language would be untenable as an essential definition of what language is. It would rather offer an explanation to an intra-linguistic phenomenon that does not really define the being of language. No shred-and-patch truth can usurp the place of truth-as-revelation. There can be no non-revelatory talk of language and therefore no exit from revelatory language. Hence the semantics of my language will remain, as Hintikka says, *ineffable*: I cannot vary the relation between language and world, thus I cannot know what it would be like if it were different, therefore I do not really know what kind of relation it is. ‘Everything we say’, Hintikka writes, ‘already presupposes the one language we are using, including the semantical relations in virtue of which it can be used to say something’, of which the corollary is that ‘we cannot step outside language and examine its relations to the world’ (*LUCR* 22).

Conversely, those who think of language as *calculus* are apt to emphasise our capacity to vary our interpretation of our language and to opt for a different language should it benefit our inquiry. We can always reinterpret language without committing ourselves to any single language that would determine how we go about the business of reinterpretation. It is necessary to note here that to think of language as calculus does not mean considering it as a formal play of empty mathematical functions. It is rather to view language such ‘that it can in principle be reinterpreted like a calculus’ (*LUCR* xi). There is, in other words, no one single domain of being that decides once and for all how the truth of a sentence is to be taken. Hence Hintikka’s remark that, although the conceptual issue is not limited to logical theory alone (*LUCR* ix), he ‘would now speak rather of the *model-theoretical tradition* in logic and philosophy of language’ (*LUCR* xi). To view language model-theoretically is to treat every sentence in relation to a model. A model is, roughly speaking, a *structured set*, whether it be a practical state of affairs or a geometrical structure. A sentence says what it says by specifying a class of models. What the elements in each model are is ultimately an indifferent matter. The only requirement is that each element fit the structure specified by the sentence. Yet what may look like the same sentence, consisting as it does of such-and-such elements, may be taken as many different sentences. ‘Peter is my rock’ does not refer to the same individual when said by a sentimental Jesus as it does when said by the sentimental wife of a man called Peter. Thus we have *two* sentences of which the specified classes of models are non-equivalent. A sentence,

then, irrespective of its surface form, means something only in relation to a class of models in which it is true. Hence Hintikka's statement on which it would be beneficial to meditate at length: 'A sentence means what it means by telling you what the world would be like if it were true' (*LUCR* 7).

This gives rise to an intriguing parallax effect. The ultimate presupposition discovered by Livingston is the *metalogical duality* that orients philosophies towards affirming either the inconsistency or the incompleteness of any system. The one argued for by Hintikka is the distinction between *language as universal medium* and *language as calculus*. Surprisingly, Hintikka's distinction falls squarely in the scope of Livingston's duality, while the latter, in its turn, seems wholly unmarked by the former. Hintikka, in other words, thinks that he sees language from afar, coolly observing its movements, while, in Livingston's view, he actually occupies a mobile position inside a broader duality.

Yet the situation is not quite as straightforward as it seems. The two movements comprising this parallax view need to be more precisely interrogated if any clarity is to be obtained. In the next section I will do this by looking the remarkably different ways in which Hintikka deals with Gödel and Derrida.

II: Hintikka's Derrida

Hintikka does not have a whole lot of good to say about Derrida.⁶ In his view Derrida has 'never been able to deconstruct successfully a single truly significant centrally philosophical (logical, epistemological or metaphysical) idea'. Instead, Hintikka snidely notes, he has opted to meditate 'on deep philosophical concepts like that of a postcard'. No wonder, then, that in Hintikka's book Derrida is marked down as 'a largely unsuccessful deconstructionist' (*LUCR* 2). Elsewhere he even goes to the length of saying that Derrida is not really a philosopher but rather a prophet, and a minor one at that⁷, because it really cannot be said of him, as it can of some others, that he 'should have known better' when it comes to choosing between the two views of language⁸. A philosopher can err, however grievous the error may be; a prophet cannot, on pain of being a false one. This applies in particular to Derrida, who, in Hintikka's view, is a direct descendant of Heidegger insofar as he sees the world 'as a text to be interpreted' (*LUCR* 10). For if this is the case, and if this task of

⁶ The following criticisms of Hintikka's dismissal of Derrida were first formulated in Poutiainen (2010). The article, written and published in Finnish, also contains in inchoate form some elements of the interpretation of Derrida—vis-à-vis Hintikka's distinction between language as universal medium and language as calculus—that I am presenting here.

⁷ Hintikka (2001), pp. 42–45.

⁸ Hintikka (2006), p. 55.

interpretation ‘cannot be carried out by means of the normal rational uses of language’ (*LUCR* 11), then evidently it follows that Derrida’s notion of ‘text’ is merely a perverse outgrowth of an already perverse doctrine. At the heart of this doctrine, again, lies the conviction that the semantics of our language cannot be expressed. Truth, if truth there be, is ineffable.

But it is Derrida’s reference to Gödel in *Dissemination* that Hintikka most vehemently puts his pincers on. Derrida, whom Hintikka cites in Barbara Johnson’s 1981 translation, writes:

An undecidable proposition, as Gödel demonstrated in 1931, is a proposition which, given a system of axioms governing a multiplicity, is neither an analytical nor a deductive consequence of those axioms, nor in contradiction with them, neither true nor false with respect to those axioms. *Tertium datur*, without synthesis.⁹

Hintikka takes this to imply that, Derrida’s undecidable ‘infrastructures’ being equivalent to Gödel’s formal systems (though Hintikka never specifies just what these infrastructures are), there can be for Derrida no consistent ‘infrastructural’ system, and hence no conceptual means by which to express the truth of *any* proposition within that system. He is thus found guilty of taking Gödel’s and Tarski’s combined results as licensing a universalist conception of language. For if the truth of a language can only be defined in a higher metalanguage, as Tarski is often taken to have conclusively shown, and if Gödel has demonstrated that every such metalanguage must necessarily be either inconsistent or incomplete, then it is not possible to bracket our working-language commitments and examine its semantics from an outside vantage. (*LUCR* 16–17)

There are many problems with this description, beginning with Hintikka’s unscholarly decision not to lay bare the sources of his interpretation. The link between ‘undecidables’ and ‘infrastructures’, for one thing, is not one that Derrida himself makes. In fact it comes from Rodolphe Gasché’s *The Tain of the Mirror*, though Hintikka does not reference this book. Yet Hintikka’s tendency to group Derrida with Richard Rorty as prophets of philosophy’s doom¹⁰ serves as a useful clue. I have already cited Hintikka’s belittling remark that the philosophically frivolous Derrida has been content to focus ‘on deep philosophical concepts like that of a postcard’ (*LUCR* 2). Hintikka, however, never goes to the trouble of actually citing Derrida’s *The Post Card*, which, had he read it, he might have recognized as a critical engagement with the very Heidegger whose descendant he takes Derrida to be. There is, however,

⁹ Derrida (2004), p. 229.

¹⁰ Hintikka (2006), p. 55.

another place where all these references converge: all, in fact, are to be found in Rorty's book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. This work—written by a thinker who is easily Hintikka's principal *bête noire* and hence liable to have been read by Hintikka—contains an essay that 1) treats Derrida as a Heideggerian 'destructor' of philosophy, 2) muses for some time on Derrida's 'post cards', and 3) engages at some length with Gasché's infrastructural interpretation of Derrida¹¹. It is therefore quite reasonable to assume that *every detail of Derrida's work that Hintikka mentions is drawn from this essay by Rorty* (and these are the only details—save for one, also to be found in the same essay, and equally traceable back to Rorty (*LUCR* 2)¹²—he mentions anywhere in his work).

Yet be Hintikka's sources what they may, it can be said, at any rate, that from Hintikka's essay a Derrida emerges who views formal systems as complete but inconsistent. A rough description, to be sure, yet it gives rise to another strange convergence that ought not to be overlooked. For in terms of Livingston's metalogical duality, Hintikka's Derrida is, just as he is in *Politics of Logic*, a proponent of what Livingston would call the paradoxico-critical orientation of thought. Both Livingston's and Hintikka's Derrida opts for completeness without consistency.

This, even more surprisingly, is precisely the question through whose rabbit-hole Hintikka falls and is then captured in the scope of Livingston's duality. In arguing ardently for a reading of Gödel that decides in favour of *consistence without completeness*, Hintikka seems to occupy a position roughly describable as criteriological. Yet it is not just any incompleteness that Hintikka goes for, as there are, let us say, optimistic and pessimistic ways to understand the issue. That Hintikka inclines to optimism can be readily seen from his claim to have shown 'that Tarski's and Gödel's results simply do not have the negative philosophical implications which they first seemed to possess and which they have usually been taken to imply' (*LUCR* 17). Hintikka distinguishes three different ways of interpreting the incompleteness theorems: *descriptive* incompleteness, *semantic* incompleteness, and *deductive* incompleteness. Hintikka describes them as follows:

- (i) Descriptive completeness is an attribute of a nonlogical axiom system T. It means that the models of T comprise all *and only* intended models, i.e. that T is sound and is able to rule out all 'nonstandard' (unintended) models.
- (ii) Semantic completeness is an attribute of axiomatizations of logic. Such an axiomatization is complete if and only if the axiomatization enumerates recursively all (and only) valid formulas, i.e., formulas true on every interpretation.

¹¹ Rorty (1989), pp. 122–137; see especially p. 126.

¹² See Rorty (1991), p. 161.

(iii) Deductive completeness is an attribute of an axiomatization of a nonlogical axiom system. It presupposes that this nonlogical axiom system is combined with an axiomatization of logic. A nonlogical axiom system T is deductively complete if and only if from it one can derive (by means of logical axioms and rules of inference) either C or $\sim C$ for each sentence C in the language of the theory. (*LUCR* 40)

The reflections following this tripartition are of distinct importance, as they exhibit, quite unwittingly, just the sort of characteristics delineated by Livingston's account. For Hintikka goes on to say that on a correct and sober reading of Gödel's theorems we are kept from affirming *descriptive* incompleteness. On such a reading it is possible to 'impose stricter requirements on models' so as to reduce their number. This 'makes descriptive completeness easier to achieve', provided that 'we are willing to give up the semantical completeness of the underlying logic', as 'the number of formulas true in all (remaining) models grows' so as to render us unable to enumerate them recursively (*LUCR* 40–41). This means that the more precisely a theory delineates what it can accept as objects belonging to its domain, the greater its ability to rule out the objects it cannot accept; but then an ever greater number of formulas are able to reach out to the models, with the result that any semantic-deductive completeness for the theory and the logic underlying it cannot be reached. 'This opens interesting vistas', Hintikka says, and he ends his discussion thus:

But doesn't the resulting inevitable semantical incompleteness of the underlying logic change the situation? I don't see that it does. Admittedly, before the logical consequences of a nonlogical theory T are spelled out, theory T does not yet reach out fully to things in themselves, independent of such by-products of our language as merely apparent possibilities concerning the world. But these consequences have to be obtained one by one no matter whether the logic is completely axiomatizable or not. *What is crucial, in neither case is there any absolute limit which cannot be transgressed.* It may be that our conceptual system and the language in which it is codified distort what we say of reality by means of this language. *However, there is no limit beyond which these distortions cannot be eliminated.* The only difference is that when the underlying logic is completely axiomatizable, the progressive elimination of the distorting effects of our language can be accomplished by a mechanical enumeration, whereas in the absence of complete axiomatization this gradual elimination depends on logician's ingenuity in coming up with new principles. This makes an important difference to the philosophy of mathematics, but not to the realism-idealism contrast. (*LUCR* 41, my emphases)

Here paradox looms; yet before approaching this issue it is necessary to take a closer look at the possibility of forming a different interpretation of Derrida whose inflections are chiefly model-theoretical.

III: World, context, model: multiplicities of reference

In both a historical and a practical perspective, model theory is a predominantly mathematical or mathematico-logical approach to phenomena, although its import, if adequately grasped, is arguably much broader than that¹³. In a fairly loose and non-technical way it can be defined as a philosophical outlook for which the truth of every statement is determined in relation to the models it specifies. It therefore has a semantic rather than syntactic view of truth insofar as it views truth as a relation between a sentence and its models. Hence model theorists speak of ‘truth in a model’ instead of ‘truth as disquotation’, ‘truth as coherence’, or ‘truth as disconcealment’. A model, or ‘model set’, can be roughly defined as a description of some state of affairs. Models are called *sets* because they contain individual members; as sets they are *structured sets*, because these members are not atomic but interrelated. A model is therefore a domain consisting of entities and their relations. The set of all equivalent model sets—to which belongs the subset of all possible worlds that are alternatives to one another—is contained in what is called a model system.¹⁴ On this view a sentence is true if and only if it can be ‘imbedded’ in a model set. This, Hintikka explains, is equivalent to saying that ‘a sentence is true in some possible world (is *satisfiable*) if it is true in the world described by some state-description’¹⁵. Model theory, when unmoored from a strictly mathematical viewpoint, is often given a flesh-and-blood ontology by framing it as some form or other of *possible-worlds semantics*. Thus a model is seen to contain a set of possible worlds, expressed in propositions, and the set of individuals and their relations that those propositions specify. It is important to note here that models ‘may be finite, and in fact very small, whereas state-descriptions are extremely large’¹⁶. Hence an emphasis on the finiteness of models also serves as a reminder that a possible world need not be a possible universe. A possible world may be no more than a possible event-situation in just one small part of the actual universe.

A model, therefore, need not contain only actual individuals. The states of affairs it specifies do not have to form a part of the actual world. Nor do they have to exist

¹³ See e.g. Porter (2005), 207–209.

¹⁴ Hintikka (1962), p. 40–48.

¹⁵ Hintikka (1973), p. 11.

¹⁶ Hintikka (1973), p. 12.

apart from the actual world. This means that the model-theoretical version of reality is neither an actualist nor a modal-realist one. For a model to be epistemically relevant it suffices that a given statement *either* 1) hold for some possible world of the model in the same way as it holds for the actual world *or* 2) express a state of affairs that is at variance with an actual one yet cannot be excised from any adequate conceptualization of the different ways our world might be. Among the insights of this view is that it does not postulate any discrepancy between meaning and reference. Hintikka uses the term *referential multiplicity* to describe how a sentence may be satisfiable in a number of possible worlds even if the referents at which the sentence aims are wildly dissimilar. Referential multiplicity, then, means that the extension of a sentence is not limited to just one individual. Thus the truth of the sentence is not decided once and for all by the existence or nonexistence of its referent in the actual world. On the contrary: it is manifold and spread across a range of possible states of affairs. This, in Hintikka's view, constitutes in great part the meaning of meaning: 'The only entities needed in the so-called theory of meaning are, in many interesting cases, merely what is required in order for the expressions of our language to be able to refer in certain more complicated situations. Instead of the theory of reference and the theory of meaning we perhaps ought to speak in some cases of the theory of simple and of multiple reference, respectively'¹⁷.

It has been suggested by Christopher Norris¹⁸ that Derrida's notion of iterability may be helpfully articulated with modal logic. From this suggestion—which is still problematic in that it does not take model theory into consideration—it might be inferred that Derrida's thinking is logically articulable with a model-theoretical semantics. This articulation would require that a strictly Derridean notion of *truth* be constructible. Model theory, it bears repeating, holds that truth is always truth *in a model*. Model-theoretic truth is truth with respect to a given structure. Logical truth, accordingly, is defined as that which holds in all possible models. Derrida, of course, is not likely to have thought of truth in such terms, which is readily seen in the nonstandard terminology he uses in describing the Gödel sentence¹⁹; to this extent Hintikka's misreading of him is forgivable. But the reasons for this are predominantly historical—and hence, to a great degree, contingent.

Yet there is, in fact, a passage in the essay 'Plato's Pharmacy' that may serve as a clue to formulating a Derridean notion of truth. At issue in this passage is a complex

¹⁷ Hintikka (1979), p. 145.

¹⁸ Norris (2006).

¹⁹ See Hintikka (1997), p. 16.

interweaving of truth and repetition in which the latter is treated as a condition of the former:

What is is not what it is, identical and identical to itself, unique, unless it *adds to itself* the possibility of being *repeated* as such. And its identity is hollowed out by that addition, withdraws itself in the supplement that presents it. The ... structure of repetition can thus no longer be dominated by the value of truth. On the contrary, the opposition between the true and the untrue is entirely comprehended, *inscribed*, within this structure or this generalized writing. The true and the untrue are both species of repetition. And there is no repetition possible without the *graphics of supplementarity*, which supplies, for the lack of a full unity, another unit that comes to relieve it, being enough of the same and enough other so that it can replace by addition. Thus, on the one hand, repetition is that without which there would be no truth: the truth of being in the intelligible form of ideality discovers in the *eidos* that which can be repeated, being the same, the clear, the stable, the identifiable in its equality with itself.²⁰

In view of my present argument the single most interesting sentence here is ‘The true and the untrue are both species of repetition’. A full appreciation of the sentence would call for a long and painstaking reading that I am unable to undertake here. Instead I will extract from it four *semantic axioms* with which all of Derrida’s thought, I argue, may be shown to be in full solidarity. Thus:

1. *It is impossible to partition (well-formed and nontautological) statements into such as are true whenever repeated and such as are false whenever repeated.* For either truth or untruth to be predicable of a statement there need be no more than one situation in which the statement is true. It is necessary, however, that there be at least one such situation.

2. *Such situations need only be possible situations.* It applies only to certain kinds of statements that they should be true at one time and false at another time. Diachrony is therefore not the sole temporal horizon of repetition. Repetition is also (logically) synchronous.

3. *The sense of each situation corresponds to a unit belonging to a totality of which the unit is an instance.* Such units can be replaced by one another without interrupting the identity of the totality. They are therefore alternatives to one another. From this it follows that all those situations in which one unit might be replaced by another are alternative situations. This lends further support to the thesis of synchronous repetition.

4. *Truth is therefore a relation that holds between a situation and a unit.* And given that the sets of units and situations are formed by additive substitution, it follows that conceptual truths are generated by the same process. A concept specifies the range of

²⁰ Derrida (2004), p. 166.

substitutions that do not break the correlation of units and situations. When a statement correlates a situation with a unit, it is repeated as true; when not, it is repeated as false.

Generalizing this axiomatic I would suggest that the Derridean notion of truth might be given the form of a neologism. Thus I hold that a sentence is *iteratrue* whenever its repetition correlates a situation and a unit. Conversely, it is *non-iteratrue* whenever no such correlation arises. ‘*The truth of the book is decidable*’, Derrida states in ‘*Le double séance*’²¹. Thus a sentence is a priori neither iteratrue nor non-iteratrue. ‘*The value of the book (true/false) is not intrinsic to it*’, Derrida continues²². For either value to be accorded to any sentence, the latter must first be (conceivable as being) repeated in a situation. By being repeated in a situation the sentence is indexed as having that situation as its interpretation. It is then either iteratrue or non-iteratrue depending on whether or not a correlated unit is an existent element in the situation.

Such would be the logic of Derridean *iteratruth*. There is much evidence in Derrida’s writings to warrant this interpretation, although, for lack of space, I cannot enter here into the sort of prolonged textual argumentation that it properly calls for. By now it should be clear, however, that Hintikka is quite wrong to see Derrida as a proponent of the language-as-universal-medium view. For even if the reading above were false, it would be only partially false, of which the corollary would be that Derrida’s thinking is somewhat inconsistent concerning these issues. And if it were thus inconsistent, there would be no reason, as I hope to have shown, why at least one segment of it should not be reinterpreted in a way that is consistent with model-theoretical approaches.

IV: Iteratruth and paradox

This, however, does not quite settle the larger issue of Derrida’s relation to Livingston’s metalogical duality. It merely leaves this relation in an unresolved tension. I pose as a hypothesis that a model-theoretical view is less consonant with Livingston’s paradoxico-critical orientation. There would be two *prima facie* reasons for this. The first is that model theory is a predominantly semantic orientation while paradoxico-criticism is a formal-syntactic orientation (*PL* 178). The second would be that model theory aims to deal with paradox and contradiction as relations of impossibility between models (so that a paradoxical expression is paradoxical only because it leaves undecided the model in which it is to be interpreted), while paradoxico-criticism, true to its name, sees in the excess of sense over reference a

²¹ Derrida (2004), p. 199.

²² Derrida (2004), p. 200.

structural inadequation that causes the structure to reflect on itself and thus results in the emergence of paradox (*PL* 178). These differences between the orientations would then come to a head in the divergence of their views as regards the relation of paradox to meaning. Paradoxico-criticism, writes Livingston, ‘understands the excess of signification, and hence the paradoxes of reflexivity, not as problematic *effects* of language but as constitutive *conditions for (the possibility of) “meaning”* as such’ (*PL* 179). Model theory, in its turn, at least as exemplified by the likes of Hintikka, would hold just the opposite: that paradox is only the semantic effect of some sort of epistemic mismatch between sentences, possible worlds, and models. Effects of this kind would be mere ‘by-products of our language’, as Hintikka says, such as ‘merely apparent possibilities concerning the world’ (*LUCR* 41). A merely apparent possibility for which a theory does not allow would therefore fall within a *nonstandard* or *unintended* model, that is, within a model that the theory cannot include without contradicting its axioms.

Hence the right way to rid a theory of apparent paradox would be to work out its axiomatization with the aim that it should ultimately reach out to the specified models and none besides. One might say, to take a Derridean example, that Husserl’s theory of *writing* remains contradictory to the extent that the predicates specifying writing (exteriority, erasure, worldliness, non-intuition) can also be found to specify its opposite, namely, *speech*, and vice versa (writing, like speech, is a transcendental guarantor of truth). There is a possible world in which the same predicate specifies both speech and writing. Hence there is also a model in which speech and writing are logically equivalent. By being shown to contain an unintended model, then, the theory is thereby rendered descriptively incomplete. Any descriptive completeness would be attainable to it only by restricting the models it allows so as to keep the contradictories from coinciding. Writing would have to be kept from acceding to the status of a transcendental condition while speech would have to be completely interiorized so as to bar it from falling into worldly exteriority. The massive and unavoidable consequence to which Derrida’s reading of Husserl leads is that no such restriction can be made without doing great injustice to the essences involved. Writing is not writing without its transcendental status, speech is not speech if it cannot be proffered in an outside. There is, then, a limit beyond which the distortions inherent in the Husserlian theory of writing *cannot* be eliminated; a fatal limit, this, since the fundamental axioms of Husserlian phenomenology are thereby seen to be inconsistent and inherently paradoxical.

Is it not striking how well this analysis accords with Derrida’s classic description of the quasi-method of deconstruction?

Taking into account that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, a conceptual structure *centered* on a given predicate, we proceed: (1) to the extraction of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analyzed), *named X*: (2) to the de-limitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name *X* being maintained as a kind of *lever of intervention*, in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organization, which is to be transformed effectively.²³

A model-theoretical interpretation of these methodological guidelines would have to focus on what Derrida says of the *predicative trait named X*. Its most elementary statement would hold that a conceptual structure—a system—is descriptively incomplete—inconsistent—if it permits a fundamental element and a derivative element to be specified as logically equivalent by a predicate that should not apply to the former but only to the latter. Thus it follows that the ‘deconstruction’ of any system takes place not only syntactically (by analysing the systematicity of the system) but also semantically (by varying the referential relations of the system). It is necessary, in other words, to try and see whether a system permits the construction of a possible world in which some such impermissible equivalence takes place. That for Derrida no system is ever entirely stable would thus imply that *every system will permit at least one possible world that falls within the range of an unintended model*. This is related to the equally classical Derridean imperative that the reading of a philosophical text ‘must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses’²⁴. A reading must relate the intended models of a system to the nonintended ones that the system nonetheless incorporates. And it is always upon the unintended model—whichever name the movement toward it assumes: writing, pharmakon, supplement, trace—that, for Derrida, the functioning of the system turns out to be founded. It is therefore necessary to add that *every system will permit reference to at least one possible world that falls within the range of an unintended model that is necessary for the functioning of the system*. This possible world is the paradoxico-critical locus where the system encodes itself and shows itself to be inconsistent.

This argument makes it necessary to qualify, in a very modest way, Livingston’s interpretation of Derrida. It seems unequivocally true to say with Livingston that what Derrida calls the undecidable ‘always results from a complication of the relationship between the “inside” and the “outside” of a total system’ (*PL* 117). ‘This kind of complication’, Livingston continues,

²³ Derrida (1981), p. 71.

²⁴ Derrida (1997), p. 158.

results from the combination of two operations: *first*, the structural principles determining the meaning and value of elements within the total system are defined and described, *as if* from a point ‘outside’ the system itself; and *second*, this definition or description is recognized as in fact taking place, necessarily and problematically, *within* the total system whose structural principles are thereby defined and delimited. There is no reason to think that each of these two operations ought not to be singly possible, but their conjunction produces the paradoxical situation of a problematic term, such as *différance*, which both ‘has’ (in the extra-systematic sense) and ‘does not have’ (in the intra-systematic sense) a meaning. (PL 117.)

Thus ‘what Derrida calls the “undecidable” always results from a semantical effect of *syntax*’ (PL 121–122). This leads to what Livingston calls an ‘essential crossing of syntax and semantics’ (PL 122)—a crossing that always depends on ‘a reflexive *inscription* of the total syntactic structure of language within itself’ (PL 179)—whereby ‘the terms that invoke the undecidable are locatable at the point at which syntax situates a kind of semantic gap or void essential to the text as such’ (PL 122). To this I would only add the following question: it being granted that each undecidable is undecidable only by virtue of a certain ‘formal or syntactic *praxis*’²⁵ which advances ‘according to the irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic’²⁶, is it not still the case that this formal or syntactic praxis is essentially *interwoven* into a movement of predication? A movement that always specifies some individual as its extension, and which is, then, a semantic movement? To propose this is not to fall back on an assumption of semantic plenitude. It matters but little that words like ‘hymen’ or ‘supplement’ have no full meaning of their own. These names, it ought to be remembered, assume importance as *names of predicative traits*, not as names of things. They stand for functions that assign to each situation a class of possible references. Thus the name ‘hymen’ comes to name something apart from the thing or concept ‘hymen’ as it is determined within the system. It names in addition a predication that is structurally indifferent to the individual of which the predicate can be said. And this predication is not just any predication but always a predication whose systematic position is a subordinate one, which means, quite importantly, that it can never aspire to foundational status. It is precisely such subordinate predications that a deconstructive reading will seek to extract and generalise. *Only by finding out the intra-systematic thing to which the predicate applies may the undecidable be given a name. This name will also name the extra-systematic referent that contradicts the system by being accessible from within the system.* This name will therefore remain provisional and limited in its operation to the system under consideration.

²⁵ Derrida (2004), p. 229.

²⁶ Derrida (2004), p. 230.

It is essential to note that such a reading cannot proceed in a purely syntactic or semantic fashion. ‘This word, this syllepsis’, Derrida says of the hymen, ‘is not indispensable [...]. It produces its effects first and foremost through the syntax [...] the suspense is due only to the placement and not to the content of words’²⁷. The word is not indispensable, but one cannot dispense with the requirement that there be *some* word to be thus placed. Without some word proffering itself as the undecidable, the syntactical placement would be irretrievably lost. And the word to be selected as the ‘occasion’ of the undecidable is always selected on the basis of a predicative structure. Yet by the same token it must be remembered that ‘a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, a conceptual structure *centered* on a given predicate’²⁸. A predicate cannot be the locus of undecidability if the structure—the syntax—is not already disposed towards it. The predicate, in other words, cannot posit itself but must be situated.

V: A fifth orientation of thought

My conclusion is therefore that the deconstruction of a system must be thought at once syntactically *and* semantically. The systematicity of the system is always deconstructible, but it requires a referential relation to something that can disrupt the smooth functioning of the system. The upshot is a new distinction between resolvable contradictions and essentially structural ones. In the passage already quoted, Hintikka says:

Admittedly, before the logical consequences of a nonlogical theory T are spelled out, theory T does not yet reach out fully to things in themselves, independent of such by-products of our language as merely apparent possibilities concerning the world. But these consequences have to be obtained one by one no matter whether the logic is completely axiomatizable or not. What is crucial, in neither case is there any absolute limit which cannot be transgressed. It may be that our conceptual system and the language in which it is codified distort what we say of reality by means of this language. However, there is no limit beyond which these distortions cannot be eliminated. (*LUCR* 41)

From a vantage point informed by *Politics of Logic* such asseverations stand testament to Hintikka’s criteriological orientation. My deconstructive response to this statement would be that indeed there is no limit beyond which a certain kind of distortion cannot be eliminated, but these distortions amount to nothing more than difficulties. Their sense as distortions is determined by an implicit teleologism, as the

²⁷ Derrida (2004), p. 230.

²⁸ Derrida (1981), p. 71.

refusal to accept any ultimate limit to logical progress relies on the regulative capacity of what Derrida calls an ‘Idea in the Kantian sense’²⁹. All such pronouncements are traversed by what I would call the *ineliminable liminality of the limit*. The consequence—as Derrida says regarding Husserl’s use of the Idea in the Kantian sense—is that the ‘substitution of ideality for nonidentity, of objectivity for nonobjectivity, is infinitely *deferred*.’³⁰ The distinctions at which such regulative Ideas aim—which are here the same for Hintikka as they are for Husserl—always end up ‘caught in the following aporia: *de facto* and *realiter* they are never respected [...]. *De jure* and *idealiter* they vanish, since, as distinctions, they live only from the difference between fact and right, reality and ideality. Their possibility is their impossibility’³¹. This translates into an argument vis-à-vis model theory that one cannot ever assume oneself to occupy a position where the possibility of non-standard models is absolutely eradicated.

Yet this is not to say that all reference to the Idea—and thus to consistency without completeness—is to be renounced. The only thing to be refuted is consistency *with* completeness. It is, in other words, solely from the notion of telos as *plenitude* that Derrida departs:

If nonplenitude (the non-*telos*) is therefore not an empirical accident of the *telos*, or even a simple negativity, one cannot not take into account as one might a contingent accident held in the margin out of concern for method or for eidetic purity. Whether it is a question of prediscursive experience or of speech acts, plenitude is at once what *orients and endangers* the intentional movement, whether it is conscious or not. There can be no intention that does not tend toward it, but also no intention that attains it without disappearing with it.³²

I argue that the question of the limit permits Derrida to be reinterpreted as both a paradoxico-critical *and* a quasi-criteriological thinker,³³ even if, in terms of Livingston’s metalogical duality, he would have to be of either one or the other kind. Yet there is one last obstacle to be overcome. For it is in fact Derrida himself who denounces the possibility that the deconstruction of a system might have to do with a reference that the system cannot tolerate. Deconstruction, Derrida says,

often consists, regularly or recurrently, in making appear—in each alleged system, in each self-interpretation of and by a system—a force of dislocation, a limit in the totalization, a limit in the movement of syllogistic synthesis. *Deconstruction is not a method for discovering that which resists the system*; it consists,

²⁹ Derrida (2005), 83–84.

³⁰ Derrida (1973), p. 100.

³¹ Derrida (1973), p. 101.

³² Derrida (1988), p. 129.

³³ See Derrida (1979), p. 133; Derrida (2005), pp. 136–137, pp. 144–145.

rather, in remarking, in the reading and interpretation of texts, that what has made it possible for philosophers to effect a system is nothing other than a certain dysfunction or ‘disadjustment’, a certain incapacity to close the system.³⁴

What I have sought to do in constructing the concept of *iteratruth* is to bring together these two movements which Derrida treats as oppositional. In doing so I will also have brought Derrida into closer proximity with Badiou than Livingston would be likely to accept³⁵. Yet if this amounts to anything like a deconstruction—to ‘make appear’ the ‘force of dislocation’ in the ‘self-interpretation’ of Derrida’s system by inscribing the concept of iterability in the context of model theory—it will follow from the minimal definition of deconstruction that I will not have contradicted this self-interpretation. The concept of iteratruth is therefore rendered *undecidable* with respect not only to Livingston’s metalogical duality—which thus emerges as a true description of Derrida’s thought—but also to Derrida’s self-description.

The consequence of this is that a truly undecidable response to the Derridean response to Gödel’s undecidability is itself undecidable. When something is experienced as undecidable it can never be taken as decided whether the undecidable to be decided upon is fundamental (irresolvable) or epiphenomenal (resolvable). On the contrary: this, I argue, is the very thing to be decided each time. And each time the decision is without ultimate assurance.

Such a relation to the undecidable calls for a new name. This new name will also be the name of the fifth orientation of thought which it has been my purpose to outline here. Its formalized description—more precisely, the formalized description of the *predicative trait* it is—would be as follows: ‘Any position that, recognizing the irreducible inscription of some unintended model within a totality, is forced to decide on the undecidable question whether the inscription of the unintended is due to a structural disposition or to a contingent failure of the system to specify its models correctly.’ The name of this orientation has to be selected both syntactically (in terms of the internal functioning of *Politics of Logic*) and semantically (in terms of the referent of which its predicative trait may be said).

That name is *Derrida*. Not deconstruction, not the undecidable, but Derrida. Within the system of *Politics of Logic*, Derrida alone names the predicative trait that specifies a possible world which the system cannot contain without being contradicted. This possible world forms part of a model that the system founded upon the duality cannot have intended. In this unintended model the Derridean corpus is

³⁴ Derrida (2001), p. 7, my emphasis.

³⁵ See *PL*, p. 207 and pp. 219–224.

defined as undecidable with regard to the metalogical duality. The result of this is that the system itself is either inconsistent or incomplete. Affirming the paradoxico-critical orientation, one may acknowledge the inconsistency of the system; but then the system fails to grasp Derrida adequately (insofar as a model-theoretical interpretation of Derrida is defensible). Affirming the criteriological orientation, one may acknowledge the incompleteness of the system; but then one will have departed from the basic axioms of the system (insofar as it supports the paradoxico-critical orientation).

The question to be followed would therefore be: of what, beyond the totality of the metalogical duality, is Derrida the name? And since the name is dispensable, having no full meaning of its own, by what other names may Derrida then be substituted? The semantic trajectory of this question must be referred to a syntactic matrix. That it cannot lie elsewhere than in *Politics of Logic* is what, for me, makes this impressive work such an indispensable—that is to say, irreplaceable—resource.

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